

BENJAMIN WEST

His Life and Work



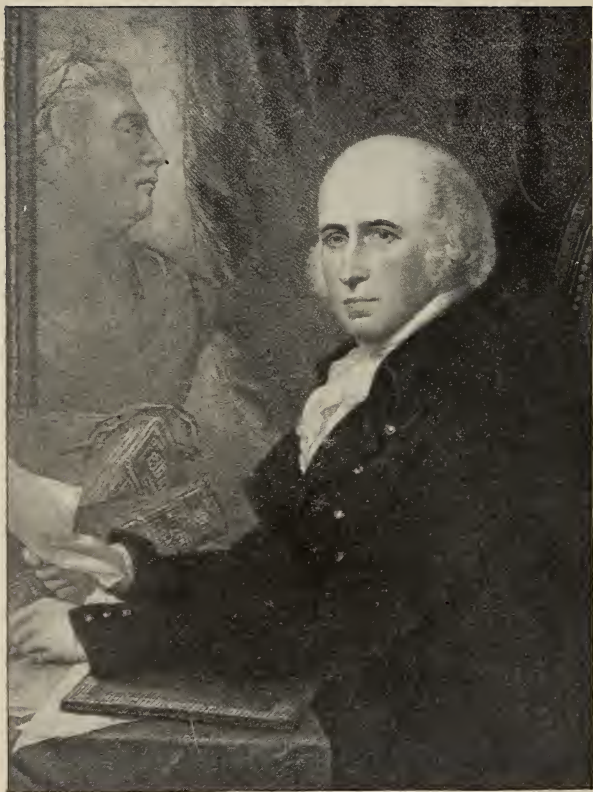


P. 001

31
379



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2015



Engraved by W. T. Fry

Painted by himself, 1793

BENJAMIN WEST

BENJAMIN WEST
HIS LIFE AND WORK

A Monograph

BY
HENRY E. JACKSON

WITH A LETTER BY
HENRY VAN DYKE

TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS

PHILADELPHIA
THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.
1900

Copyright, 1900
BY HENRY E. JACKSON

PRINTED BY REQUEST OF THE WEST MEMORIAL COMMITTEE FOR
THE PURPOSE OF RAISING FUNDS TO ERECT A MONUMENT
TO THE MEMORY OF WEST IN SWARTHMORE, PA.,
HIS BIRTHPLACE

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Princeton

Dec. 11. 1900.

My dear Sir:

The proposal to erect a monument to Benjamin West has my sincere approval. The country which fails to honour its great men in the past has little hope of producing more in the future. A worthy monument to a distinguished artist is an inspiration to art. The school of West has gone out of fashion, but he did illustrious work in it. His name deserves a memorial, and the right place for it is his birth-place.

Very sincerely yours

Henry van Dyke



PREFATORY NOTE

At a recent meeting of the citizens of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, it was proposed to erect a monument to the memory of Benjamin West, the Father of American Art, who was born in the quaint old house standing on the campus of Swarthmore College and recently marked with a tablet by the Delaware County Historical Society. The following Committee was appointed to carry out the plans of the meeting: Rev. Henry E. Jackson, Chairman; Frederick M. Simons, Treasurer; George A. Marr, Secretary; Miss Beatrice Magill, Chairman of the Art Committee; W. H. Gutelius, Chairman of the Finance Committee; Prof. A. H. Tomlinson, Chairman of the Construction Committee; Mrs. L. H. Bigelow, Mrs. W. W. Birdsall, Mrs. C. H. Bedell, Dr. Edward H. Magill, formerly President of Swarthmore College, J. W. Champion, Otto S. Kolle, Francis C. Pyle, Susan J. Cunningham and James Monaghan.

Prefatory Note

Mr. Jackson has placed at the disposal of the Committee the manuscript of a biographical study of the life and a critical review of the work of Benjamin West, which will be published as a memorial volume. The Committee considers itself fortunate in thus being able to give, in the brief form now so much in demand and at small cost, a complete and fully illustrated biography of Benjamin West, furnishing in detail all the varied and romantic incidents of his life and reviewing his career as an artist in a popular and scholarly manner.

S. G. W. Benjamin, the art critic, in his "Art in America," characterizes West as "one of the greatest men our country has produced." Judged by the standards of his time, he did important service to the cause of art. "It unquestionably implied daring and consciousness of power," says Benjamin, "to brave the opposition of contemporary opinion and abandon classic costume in his historical compositions as he did, to win to his side the judgment of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and create a revolution in certain phases of art."

Not only as artist but also as philanthropist, West deserves to be remembered, for thousands

Prefatory Note

of patients at the Pennsylvania Hospital, beyond doubt, owe their lives to the endowment fund from his picture "Christ Healing the Sick" presented by him to that institution.

Who can read the story of his life, from Quaker country lad to Court painter and President of the Royal Academy, without a fresh incentive to labor? How can we better keep alive his inspiring memory than by pen, pencil and memorial shaft?

Mr. Brice, author of "The American Commonwealth," has pointed out that the Swiss, a peculiarly unimaginative people, by familiarity with their own annals, by national songs, by the celebration of anniversaries, by the statues of departed heroes, by the preservation of ancient buildings, by historical and antiquarian museums, have not only become penetrated and pervaded by patriotism, but have learned to carry its spirit into the workings of their institutions.

Nothing permanent has ever been done in America to honor West's memory. The Committee, desiring to make the memorial worthy of the subject, has consulted Frederick Mac-

Prefatory Note

Monnies—maker of the MacMonnies fountain at the World's Fair at Chicago, the statue of Nathan Hale in City Hall Park, New York, the statue of Shakespeare in the Congressional Library at Washington, and other notable works of art—who is a descendant of West, and he offers to furnish a design for the monument, (which the Committee hopes to be able to accept) and promises a generous contribution towards its erection.

The Committee appeals to all who wish to cherish the great memories of the past to aid in erecting this memorial.

The Committee.

THE FOREWORD.

MR. Holman Hunt, in a letter addressed to Frederic W. Farrar, once said, "It has always 'increasingly with my experience' seemed both surprising and unfortunate that men of culture, who are without pretense to knowledge of the technical qualities of art, do not often enough express their feeling about the works which sculptors and painters and, indeed, architects do. England of late years particularly has suffered from want of large, independent expression of feeling on art."

It is in the spirit of this letter that the following monograph is written, and the writer asks the reader kindly to bear in mind that it is as a layman without any knowledge of the technic of art, that he writes.

All available sources, which are exceedingly meagre, have been drawn upon that the leading facts of West's life might be brought within a small compass and a brief popular estimate of his work be given.

The monograph was originally prepared as a lecture, with no thought of publication, and delivered to the citizens of Swarthmore that they might be helped to give to their at-one-time townsman his "guerdon and glory," and keep green the memory we ought not willingly let die.

Browning, in his poem "Old Pictures in Florence," expresses the same feeling for the pioneers of Italian art, which we ought to have for the pioneers of English art, among whom West held no mean place.

"But at any rate I have loved the season
Of art's spring-birth so dim and dewy
My sculptor is Nicolo, the Pisan
My painter—who but Cimabue."

Swarthmore, Pa., Dec. 1, 1900.

H. E. J.

“GENTLEMEN: It is a great treasure and a great trust which is put into our hands. The fine arts were late before they crossed the British Channel, but now we may fairly pronounce that they have made their especial abode with us. There is nothing in this climate unpropitious to their growth; and if the idea has been conceived in the world, enough has been done by the artists of Great Britain to disprove it. I know that I am speaking to the first professional characters in Europe in every branch of elegant art, as well as those who are most distinguished in taste and judgment. If there be diffused through this country a spirit of encouragement equal to the abilities which are ripe to meet it, I may venture to predict that the sun of our arts will have a long and glorious career.”

BENJAMIN WEST.

Taken from the first discourse
to the Students of the Royal
Academy, December 10, 1792.

CONTENTS.

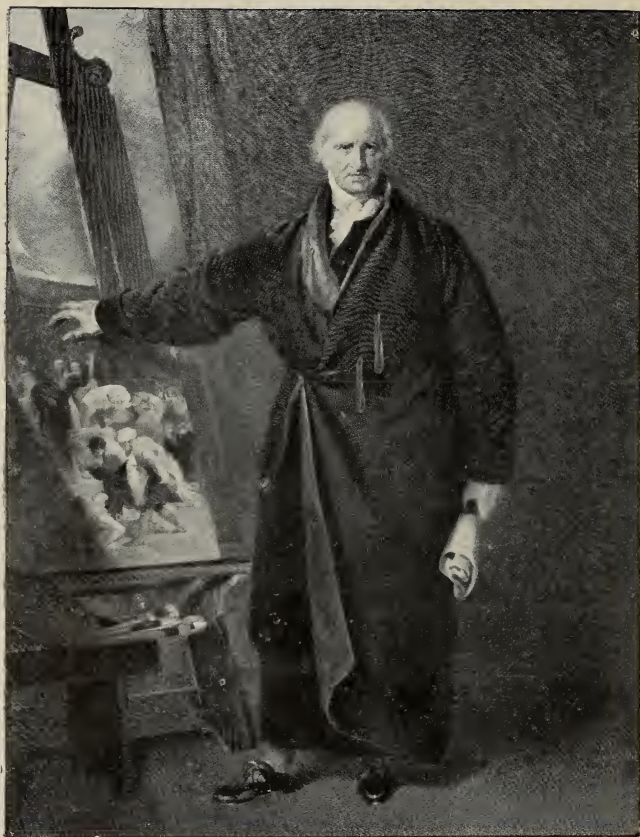
I. The Birth of Fine Art in America	13
II. West's Early Life in his Wilderness Home	20
III. West Chooses Painting as a Vocation . .	27
IV. West's Love Romance and his Life in Italy	35
V. West in England. His Relation to America	50
VI. West's Portrait Paintings	65
VII. His Religious Pictures	72
VIII. His Lesser Historical Scenes	84
IX. His Greater Historical Scenes	93
X. Mrs. Browning's Defence of Benjamin West	108

“THE greatest misfortune that can happen to any people is to have no noble deeds and no heroic personalities to look back to, for as a wise present is the seed of a fruitful future, so a great past is the seed of a hopeful present. It is in this respect with peoples as it is with families—nothing stands in the world unconnected with the past or unproductive of the future. And as certainly as it requires a peculiar virtue in the child to resist the evil influence of a worthless parentage, so certainly will that people require a double grace from heaven in respect to future achievement, which starts with no elevating memories from the past. But there is a greater misfortune than this, and not merely a misfortune, but a crime, viz.: to have had noble ancestors and to forget them.”

JOHN STUART BLACKIE.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

- I. Portrait of West (Frontispiece) *West*
- II. Portrait of West *Lawrence*
- III. House in which West was Born
- IV. "West's First Effort in Art" *Ward*
- V. Portrait of West's Family *West*
- VI. "Christ Healing the Sick" *West*
- VII. "King Lear" *West*
- VIII. "Christ Rejected" *West*
- IX. "Alexander and his Physician" *West*
- X. "Death of General Wolfe" *West*
- XI. "Penn's Treaty with the Indians" *West*
- XII. "Cimabue's Madonna" *Leighton*



Engraved by Charles Rolls

BENJAMIN WEST

Sir Thomas Lawrence



I.

THE BIRTH OF FINE ART IN AMERICA.

“Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts: the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three, the only quite trustworthy one is the last.”—
RUSKIN.

AMONG the original thirteen colonies of the new world, Pennsylvania had the honor of being the pioneer in many departments. It was here that Bartram founded the first botanic garden in America. It was here that Franklin founded the first American Philosophical Institution, and assisted in founding the first public library in America. Here were founded America's first medical and law schools. Here was set up the first book printing press on this side the Atlantic and previous to the Revolutionary War, more books were published in Pennsylvania than in all the other colonies combined.

This remarkable activity along educational and philanthropic lines was due indirectly to the Quaker rule. Because under the mild government of the Friends, Pennsylvania became a refuge for the persecuted and a home for men of science and scholarship. Dr. Priestley, the father of modern chemistry was among those who came to this free atmosphere. And when Congress wanted to have the Declaration of Independence translated into seven European languages, Peter Miller, of Pennsylvania, was found to be the man learned enough to perform the task. It is not hard, therefore, to understand why Penn's colony should be thus prominent in the arts of peace. The atmosphere of the Friends, congenial as it was to such work and studies, is a sufficient explanation of this activity.

But it is a matter of some surprise that not only Pennsylvania, but the Society of Friends itself should have been the home of the first great American painter, Benjamin West. For it was one of the prominent doctrines among the Friends, "That things merely ornamental

were not necessary to the well-being of man, but rather superfluous," and among those merely ornamental and superfluous things, was the art of painting. Hence until West was six years old he never saw a painting or an engraving. It will thus be seen that West's religious environment was the least calculated to account for his choice of a profession.

Nor could the natural scenery of Pennsylvania, wild and beautiful as it was, do much by way of producing an artist. For while beautiful scenery speaks a divine language to a cultivated mind, it is only to a mind already cultivated that she thus speaks. Of herself, nature can never produce poetic feelings or create an imagination. It is a noteworthy fact, as Galt remarks, that of all the nations of Europe the Swiss are the least poetical and yet the scenery of no other country seems so well calculated as that of Switzerland to awaken the imagination. On the other hand, Shakespeare grew up in one of the least picturesque districts of England and yet in him the imagination reached its highest development.

The fact is, if you seek an explanation of the advent of any great man, you may find it partly but never wholly in his natural human environment. After giving due weight to his natural surroundings and to the intellectual forces at work around him, we must always fall back for an explanation on what we cannot define more definitely than by saying, "It is his personality," a strange, subtle endowment, which we cannot grasp or explain, but which itself explains most of all, any man's work or influence. Each man's God-given personality is the only creative power in this world. All great men like poets are born not made. He will achieve greatness either with the help of, or in spite of his surroundings. Benjamin West became the first great American painter, not because of his wilderness home, far away from the centers of art and culture, or of his Quaker training, but in spite of them. John Galt, West's personal friend and biographer, was right when he sought no explanation of West's genius outside of West himself.

It is for this reason that West's portrait is one of the best commentaries on his life and work, as Carlyle thought was the case with Giotto's wonderful portrait of Dante. Not only so, but the portrait of West to be selected, is not the portrait by Lawrence, West's successor in the presidency of the Royal Academy, now in the National Gallery, London, and in the Wadsworth Gallery at Hartford, Connecticut. Lawrence has dressed West in the gown he wore in his studio, and represents him in the act of lecturing to students. He was lecturing on the theory of color, hence the presence of the rainbow by which he illustrated his subject. He has introduced part of the cartoon of his "Death of Ananias." Lawrence was employed to paint the portrait by friends of West in New York. Nor is the likeness to be selected the bust of West by Sir Francis Chantrey, now in the National Gallery, London, but the portrait of West painted by himself, a cut of which is here given. West makes himself a handsomer man than Lawrence represents him to be; not that West

consciously made a flattered likeness of himself. Like every other artist he was fond of painting his own portrait. In Florence there is a gallery with hundreds of portraits of artists, painted by themselves, and the same thing is true of each of these, that is true of West's. In each case there is an expression, a loftiness of character in the portrait that other people did not see in the man. The explanation is to be found in the fact that the painter has painted it from within, not from without. He has painted it from his heart knowledge, rather than from the knowledge he acquired by looking in a mirror. The result is, we have not so good a physical likeness, but a better portrait of the man's character. The record of West's life and work is written on his own portrait and with it corresponds.

In West, fine art in America had its birth, but he became the first great American painter almost wholly through his own genius. "Painters are but the hands, and poets but the voices, whereby peoples express their accumulated thoughts and permanent emotions." West's

were among the first hands, whose cunning depended on his own skill, which sought to express "the accumulated thoughts and permanent emotions," not only of the peoples in the new world, but of all peoples who spoke the English tongue.



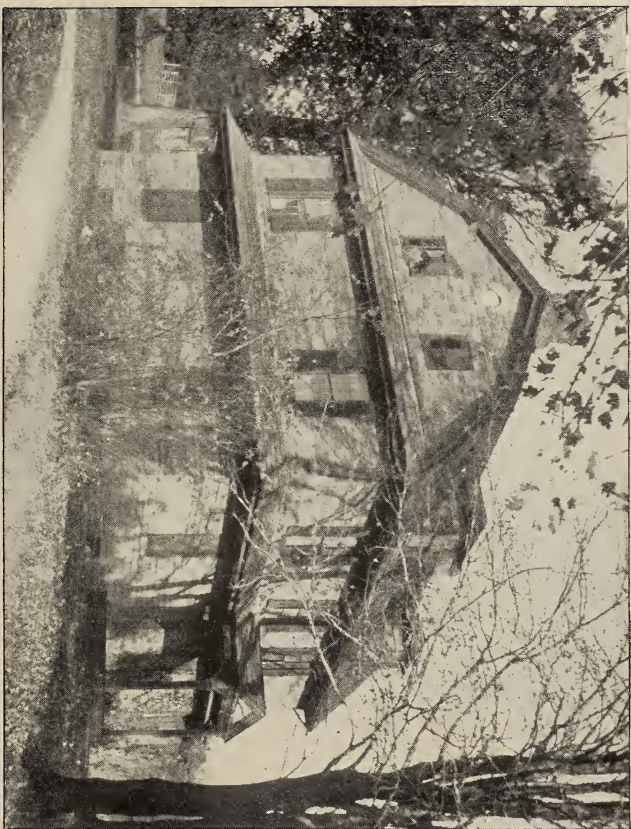
II.

WEST'S EARLY LIFE IN HIS WILDERNESS HOME

"The longer I live the more certain I am that the great difference between men, the feeble and the powerful, the great and the insignificant, is energy and invincible determination—a purpose once fixed and then death or victory. That quality will do anything that can be done in this world, and no talents, no circumstances, no opportunities will make a two-legged creature a man without it,"—SIR T. FOWELL BUXTON.

BENJAMIN WEST was born October 10, 1738, one hundred and sixty-two years ago. It is a fact worthy of note that the first six leading American painters came in pairs. Copley and West were born in 1737 and 1738; Stewart and Trumbull in 1756; Vanderlyn in 1776 and Alston three years later. This is only a minor illustration of the fact, often remarked, that the great men in the world's history have usually come in spots.

West was born in what is now the town of Swarthmore, Springfield Township, Pennsylv-



HOUSE IN WHICH WEST WAS BORN, OCTOBER 10, 1738

vania. Galt says he was born in the "town of Springfield." In the early days of Pennsylvania, and it is still a custom in New England, the town included the country side together with two or three or more villages. It was synonymous with the modern county. In Pennsylvania the county has taken the place of the town, and the town has been narrowed down to the limits of the village. This explains Galt's remark.

West was born in a house—a cut of which is here given—which dates back to 1724, almost to the time when the first Friends landed in Pennsylvania. In 1873 a fire broke out in the house which destroyed the interior, together with some specimens of West's boyish art on the walls. The stone walls were left uninjured, and the house was restored by Swarthmore College, to which the property now belongs. In 1898 a granite slab was placed in the southern wall of the house, near the window of the room in which West was born. It bears the following inscription :

BENJAMIN WEST, P.R.A.

Was born in this house

8th month, 10th, 1738.

Placed by the Delaware Co., Historical Society,
1898.

The tablet was unveiled with appropriate ceremonies, among which was a poem written and read by Professor J. Russell Hayes. The poem breathes the spirit with which we should cherish our famous landmarks :

“ And Thee, Old House, that slumberest serenely,
We cherish as the painter's boyhood home
With tender care, yon college, young and queenly,
Doth shadow Thee with her protecting dome.
 In academic shades
 The artist's fame shall last,
 Here glory never fades
 Nor reverence for the Past.”

The first romance of West's life was in connection with his birth. For this old house narrowly escaped the honor which his birth conferred upon it. Edmund Peckover, a celebrated Quaker orator, was preaching in the meeting house, erected by Mrs. West's father, about a mile and a half north of the house. Mrs. West was already the mother of nine children and was about to become the mother

of Benjamin. She was present at the meeting. The orator was so vehement in his denunciations of European life and its mercenary spirit and so eloquent in his praises of the new life in America, that Mrs. West became nervous and was taken sick. The meeting was broken up. The women surrounded Mrs. West and carried her home where Benjamin was prematurely born. The orator and friends of the family predicted that a child who came into the world in so wonderful a manner was destined to have a brilliant future. Whatever we may think of the basis of this prophecy, certain it is that West's future career was attended at every step with romance.

West's immediate ancestors accompanied William Penn to this country. His maternal grandfather was allowed by Penn to name the City of Chester in honor of his old home in England. In the atmosphere which the earnest, sincere, simple and kindly men of Penn's colony brought with them to Penn's forest, West grew up. It was an atmosphere of hospitality. In these primitive days, "when

hunger made acorns savory and thirst made every streamlet nectar," it was the custom among those who lived on the highways, after supper and the last religious exercises of the evening, to make a large fire in the hall and to set a table with refreshments for such travelers who might pass during the night. When the family came down in the morning they seldom found that the table had not been visited. Such was the custom at Springfield, and, with this spirit in the home, it is not difficult to understand how young West was on terms of friendliness with the Indians. It is beautiful to notice that the Indians taught him how to prepare the red and yellow colors with which they painted themselves and their ornaments. To these his mother added blue from her indigo and thus he came into possession of the three primary colors, red, blue and yellow. He manufactured green by mixing the yellow with the blue. The Indians also taught him to be an expert archer, so that he could shoot birds for models.

In connection with West's early equipment as a painter, the part which the family cat played in his art ought not to be passed by in silence. The strange antipathy to cats, which Oliver Wendell Holmes describes in his "Elsie Venner," and which many persons have, did not belong to young West. The neighbors, who were interested in the child's drawings, regretted that he had no pencils with which to work. He asked what they were and was told that they were small brushes made of camel's hair and fastened in a quill. Since there were no camels in America, West could think of no substitute until it occurred to him that his father's favorite black cat "Grimalkin," would answer for a camel. He immediately carried his idea into execution, cut the hair from the end of her tail and made his first brush. As his need increased he supplied it from the cat's back, and in proportion as his need increased, the cat presented a sorry sight. The father noticed the cat's altered appearance and lamented the disease that produced it. The guilty and penitent Benjamin at last con-

fessed the true cause of "Grimalkin's" misfortune, but the son's ingenuity so pleased the father that he escaped punishment. Necessity is the mother of invention, and the sturdy self-reliance, which the isolated life of West's wilderness home naturally developed, characterized his whole later life and work.



Engraved by J. Carter

E. M. Ward

WEST'S FIRST EFFORT IN ART



III.

WEST CHOOSES PAINTING AS A VOCATION.

"The child is father of the man
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety."

WORDSWORTH.

No sketch of West would be complete without the mention of an incident in his early life, which is as beautiful as it is prophetic of his future career. When he was seven years old his elder sister with her infant child, was visiting her parents, and one day when the child was asleep in the cradle, Mrs. West went out with her daughter to gather flowers in the garden, leaving the child in charge of Benjamin. During this absence the baby smiled in her sleep and attracted the boy's attention. He picked up paper, and some pens of red and black ink from the table and began to draw a portrait of the baby as the picture, here given, represents him as doing. When

his mother and sister returned he tried to hide what he had done, but his mother, noticing his confusion, asked him to show her the paper. He presented the paper, pleading with her not to be angry. After looking at it his mother exclaimed, "I declare he has made a likeness of little Sallie." She then threw her arms about him and kissed him fondly. "It was this kiss from my mother," said West in after years, "that made me a painter." Galt says, "this kiss was the birth of fine art in the new world."

One year later, a Mr. Pennington of Philadelphia, a relation of West's, was so impressed with the boy's drawings of birds and flowers, that he sent him a box of paints and pencils, together with some canvass and six engravings by Grevling. This gift filled West's world full. He put them on a chair by his bed and would waken several times during the night and touch them with his hand to assure himself that they were real. But every blessing is accompanied with danger and this was no exception to the rule. The paints were the

occasion of his playing truant from school and retiring to the garret to test them and his own skill. During three or four days in the garret he produced a picture, a combination of two of the engravings, with so much skill that his ingenuity again saved him from punishment on the part of his father and school teacher. Sixty-seven years later West said to Galt as they were examining his famous picture "Christ rejected," that there were inventive touches in this first attempt in the garret that with all his later experience he had not been able to surpass. Perhaps it is for this reason, as well as its historic interest, that this first attempt now a small and faded landscape, hangs by the side of his "Christ healing the sick," in the Royal Academy of London. His early developed capacity, early brought him work to do. He painted portraits of friends in Philadelphia, Chester and Lancaster. When at Lancaster, he painted his "Death of Socrates," with a handsome young workman for his model of the slave who administered the poison.

The bent of his genius was now apparent, and led to a crisis in his life—a crisis of singular interest. When he was sixteen years old his father was anxious to settle him in business. The boy's aptness and capacity for painting were such that he did not want to thwart the bias of his talent, and yet he knew that the profession of a painter was adverse to the religious tenets of the Friends. In this perplexity a meeting of the Society of Friends was called to decide the destiny of his son. In regard to the story of this meeting as well as other stories it ought to be said, that around the picturesque person of West have grown up many romantic stories which have, perhaps, been embellished. But those who dogmatically assert, as Dunlap does in his "History of the Arts of Design," that the story of West's first effort in art and the story of this meeting are pure fiction, give no valid reasons for rejecting them. And while the stories may not be reliable in all their details, we have, no doubt, the essential truth or spirit of the occurrences which after all is the thing of value. The account

of this meeting which has been handed down preserves for us, we may believe, the spirit of what actually took place. In the meeting house near Springfield there was a large attendance. After prolonged debate in which there was great difference of opinion and deep feeling a certain John Williamson arose and delivered a speech which deserves to be remembered and ought to make Williamson one of the saints on the Friend's calendar. He said in part, "Friend West and his wife have blameless reputations. They have had ten children, whom they have carefully brought up in the fear of God and the Christian religion. And the youth whose lot in life we are now convened to consider, is Benjamin, their youngest child. It is known to you all that God is pleased from time to time to bestow on some men extraordinary gifts of mind, and you need not be told by how wonderful an inspiration their son has been led to cultivate the art of painting. It is true that our tenets deny the utility of that art to mankind. But God has bestowed on the youth a genius for the art, and can we

believe that Omniscience bestows His gifts but for great purposes? What God has given who shall dare to throw away? Let us not estimate Almighty Wisdom by our notions, let us not presume to arraign His judgment by our ignorance. * * * By our maxims we have excluded the study of the fine arts for we see them applied only to embellish pleasures and to strengthen our inducements to gratify the senses at the expense of our immortal claims. But because we have seen painting put to this derogatory use and have in consequence prohibited the cultivation of it among us, are we sure that it is not one of those gracious gifts which God has bestowed on the world, not to add to the sensual pleasures of man, but to facilitate his improvement as a social and moral being? The fine arts are called the offspring and the emblems of peace. The Christian religion itself, is the doctrine of good will to man. Can these things which only prosper in peace be contrary to the Christian religion? But it is said that the fine arts soften and emasculate the mind. In what way? Is it by

withdrawing those who study them from the robust exercises which enable nations and people to make war with success? Is it by lessening the disposition of mankind to destroy one another and by taming the audacity of their animal fierceness? Is it for such a reason as this, that we who profess to live in unison and friendship, not only among ourselves but with all the world, that we should object to the cultivation of the fine arts, of those arts that disarm the natural ferocity of man? We may as well be told that the doctrine of peace and life ought to be proscribed in the world, because it is pernicious to the practice of war and slaughter, as that the arts which call on man to exercise his intellectual powers more than his physical strength can be contrary to Christianity. * * * Can we believe that the fine arts are not for some useful purpose? What that purpose is, ought we to pretend to investigate? Let us rather reflect that the Almighty God has been pleased among us and in this remote wilderness to endow, with the rich gifts of a peculiar spirit, this youth. May

it be demonstrated by the life and works of the artist that the gift of God has not been bestowed on him in vain, nor the motives of the beneficent inspiration which induces us to suspend our particular tenets prove barren of religious and moral effect." This speech, with its cogent logic, its self-evident truth and its eloquence, which even yet has not all evaporated, won the day as it deserved to do. The meeting gave its consent, to West's choice of a profession. At its close the women rose and kissed the young artist and the men one by one laid their hands on his head, praying for a blessing on his life and work. Thus, says Galt, the Friends, the desendants of the iconoclasts who had beaten down statues and burned masterpieces of art, were about to show to the world, that the love of beauty is universal and unquenchable and that the sternness of the Puritans was directed not so much against art and beauty, when legitimately employed, but against the abuse of the emblems of the best aspirations of the human soul.



Engraved by G. S. & J. G. Facius

BENJAMIN WEST AND HIS FAMILY

West



IV.

WEST'S LOVE ROMANCE AND HIS LIFE IN ITALY

“For indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid
Not only to keep down the base in man
But teach high thoughts and amiable words
And courtliness and the desire of fame
And love of truth and all that makes a man.”

—TENNYSON.

WITH the benediction of his people upon his life work, West now set up as a portrait painter in Philadelphia and achieved some success, while at the same time he began his study of history under private tutors. These quiet days of study were not uneventful, as no period of West's life was. If other inspiration was needed than that which he received in the little meeting house at Springfield when he was made to feel that his work was to be a religious mission rather than an ambitious career, that inspiration was now found in the next great experience of his life, an experi-

ence second to none in its power to inspire faithful work and noble achievement, the experience of a sincere love for a good woman. No other experience so inspired West's ambition to be a great religious painter and embody the spiritual aspirations of the soul. For aside from Christ Himself, there is no better revelation of God to this world than the heart of a true woman. West loved and was loved in turn by Elizabeth Shewell, to whom he had been introduced by his friend "Mad" Anthony Wayne. She is the central figure of the picture here given. West is in the upper right hand corner. The two men sitting down are West's half-brother Thomas and his father. West's treatment of his father was always beautiful. It was like that of the artist Turner, whose father modestly wanted to be a servant in his son's house, but to whom his great son said, "No, we fought the world together and now that it seeks to honor me, you shall share all the benefits." It was like that of the artist Herkomer, whose first act, when he rose to name and fame in London, was to bring to his

home, his old father, who was a simple wood-chopper in the Black Forest. West's father is properly introduced into this family group in the picture, for he played an important role in his son's love romance. Elizabeth Shewell came from a good old English family but she was an orphan and lived with her brother, a wealthy merchant of Philadelphia. Elizabeth was gentle and beautiful and of great force of character. Her brother was a man of iron will, and wanted her to marry a wealthy suitor, a friend of his. Her love was already pledged to West, besides she did not love her brother's friend. Her brother forbade her to see the young unknown struggling artist. She disobeyed her brother's command and met West secretly at the home of a friend. When her brother discovered it, he locked her in her room a solitary prisoner and she saw West no more for five years.

The sufferings of Elizabeth, together with hard work were too much for West to endure and he became sick with a fever. The sickness was a cloud not without its silver lining.

For it was the occasion of his discovery of the "Camera Obscura." It was on this wise: The fever left him so weak that he was obliged to remain in bed for days and to have his room darkened. The darkened room so dilated the pupil of his eye that he could distinctly see everything in the room. One day while lying in bed, he saw the form of a white cow enter at one side of the roof, walk across the bed and vanish at the other. This astonished him, and he feared his mind was impaired by the disease. His sister, Mrs. Clarkson, in whose house he was, also feared he was delirious. She brought her husband to the room. West repeated his story and said, at that moment he saw several little pigs running along the roof. This confirmed his delirium in their minds and they sent for a physician. The physician found no symptoms of fever; the pulse was regular, the skin moist and cool, but he gave some medicine to compose his patient. After his departure, West got up to investigate the cause of his visions and discovered a diagonal knothole in the window shutters. When he

put his hand over it, the pictures on the wall disappeared. He thus began to believe that there must be some simple natural cause for what he had seen, and he experimented with a horizontal hole in the shutters so as to throw the pictures on the side wall, but to his surprise, the objects were inverted. He now contrived a box and with the help of a mirror invented the camera. He was delighted to secure the means for showing him how objects ought to appear in a painting. When he told his discovery to the painter, Williams, a few weeks later, he received a needed lesson in humility when he learned that Williams was already the possessor of a complete camera sent to him from England. His discovery had been anticipated. But, that a young man should invent one independently, shows his keenness of observation, so necessary for the work of an artist, to which he had dedicated himself.

The lesson of this invention and the ambition to excel which his love experience had inspired, soon made West sensible of the fact

that he could not attain eminence in his work unless he visited Europe to inspect the great masterpieces of art, and compare his power with that of the masters, that he might understand the task before him, if he was ever to do worthy work. Whether Elizabeth Shewell should ever become his wife or not, his love for her had done its work for him and created ambitions that would not die. He had already gained her in a true sense. He had seen a vision. Henceforth to that vision he must be obedient. He resolved to visit Europe, and while he waited for the consummation of his fond hopes, to make himself worthy of the true soul, to whom his love was pledged.

With this end in view, he left Philadelphia and went to New York where he could get a better price for his portraits, and thus secure money to make his journey possible. He says he found New York much less intelligent in matters of taste and knowledge, than Philadelphia, for New York was wholly devoted to mercantile pursuits. And yet it was a merchant of New York, who furnished the

means for West's visit to Europe. Next to the man who writes or paints a good work, is the man who appreciates it. This piece of good fortune, of which West's life is full, came to him on this wise: While he was in New York, and in the year 1759, the harvest of Italy fell far below the needs of the country. Messrs. Rutherford & Jackson, of Leghorn, foreseeing a famine, wrote their correspondent Mr. Allen, of Philadelphia, to send a cargo of wheat and flour. Mr. Allen wanted his son to accompany the cargo and see something of the world. Mr. Smith, West's old teacher, asked Mr. Allen to allow West to go with his son. West was informed of the plan. He expressed his desire to Mr. William Kelly, of New York, whose portrait he was painting. When it was finished, Mr. Kelly handed West a letter, to be presented to his agents in Philadelphia. When the letter was opened it was found that Kelly had ordered his agents to pay West fifty guineas to enable the young gentleman to study the fine arts in Europe. Accordingly West, when twenty-two years old, and

in the year 1760, went to Italy and studied for three years.

West's visit to Italy changed the future course of his life. He never saw America again. The reason why England and not America became his future home illustrates one of the great principles of George Eliot's writings, that men and women are made by men and women. That the nature and course of our lives are in the hands of the men and women about us, to a greater extent than we even dream. While in Italy, West visited the picture galleries and studied the masterpieces. The Venetian School interested him the most. Titian's coloring was a puzzle to him. He set himself to discover its secret. He thought he made the discovery. He said it was not due to penciling or to superior materials, but to the artist's delicacy of sight. This led West to paint first with the pure primary colors and then soften them with semi-tints. After years of experiments he felt that his discovery was correct. Two incidents of his life in Rome not only deserve to be mentioned but will

serve to show the connection between his visit to Italy and his future life in England. While at Rome he became the protégé of a Mr. Robinson, a prominent Englishman. Mr. Robinson with about thirty of the leading artists then in Rome, of which Rome is always full, took the young Quaker to view the masterpieces of art, and hear his criticisms. They took him first to see the Apollo Belvidere. When it was first revealed to him, West, all unconscious of the spectators who were arranged so as to watch the effect of this masterpiece on him, exclaimed, "My God, how like it is to a young Mohawk warrior." When Mr. Robinson translated this remark to the company, they were chagrined to have the Apollo compared to a savage. But when West explained to them, the Indian's education, their dexterity with the bow and arrow, the elasticity of their limbs, how their active life expands the chest, while the quick breathing of their speed in the chase dilates the nostrils with the same consciousness of power as is seen in the Apollo and how he had seen

them often standing in that very attitude and pursuing with an intense eye, the arrow which they had discharged from the bow, the artists present said it was the best criticism they had heard on the Apollo.

The other incident referred to is in connection with the artist Mengs. He was then at the height of his power and popularity as a painter. He was now painting Robinson's portrait. West also agreed to paint it, in order to show Mengs, a sample of his work. It was agreed to keep it a secret from the other artists. When West's portrait was finished and the whole company of artists was gathered to view it, the universal verdict was that Mengs had surpassed himself and had never done anything so fine. Then the secret was revealed, that it was West's and not Mengs' and the incident greatly added to West's fortune as a painter.

The news of this occurrence reached Philadelphia by means of the boat which had brought the cargo of wheat to Italy and the owner, Mr. Allen, received it while at dinner,

with Governor Hamilton, of Pennsylvania and others. They immediately sent word to their bankers in Florence to give West unlimited credit, to aid the first young American who had gone to Europe to cultivate the fine arts. By means of this generous gift, West decided to visit England on his way home to America.

On August 20th and when West was twenty-five years old, he arrived in England. His fame had already preceded him and he was at once introduced to the leading men, among them, Dr. Johnson, Burke and Archbishop Drummond. So warm was West's welcome and so well received were his first pictures, that eminent Statesmen and Bishops tried to induce him to make England his home. West answered that there was only one obstacle in the way of accepting their kind invitation. He was betrothed to a young woman in Philadelphia and he desired to return to America to marry her. How this obstacle was surmounted constitutes the last chapter in a love romance, stranger than fiction.

West had been in Italy for three years and had not seen Elizabeth Shewell for five. His position now warranted their marriage and he requested Elizabeth to come to England, thinking that because he was no longer an unknown struggling artist, her brother would give his consent. This Elizabeth was glad to do, for her love had now become a religion. But her brother would not yield and when he discovered Elizabeth's desire, she was again a prisoner in her own room. Some friends of West's now determined to come to his relief and her rescue. These friends were Benjamin Franklin, William White (afterwards Bishop of Pennsylvania), and Hopkinson (afterwards Judge). The plan agreed upon, daring as it was, was carried out successfully. It was past midnight and a vessel at the dock was ready to sail for England in less than an hour. These three friends were outside her brother's mansion. All was quiet. The third-story window was raised. Up to it was thrown a cord, to which was attached a rope ladder. If Mr. Shewell was aroused, all was lost.

Elizabeth quietly descended the ladder. A cab was in waiting at the next corner. She was driven in speed to the vessel. Mr. West's father was on board to accompany his future daughter to England. A few minutes later the vessel weighed anchor. The danger was past. After a stormy voyage, they arrived in Liverpool. The romantic meeting between Elizabeth Shewell and Benjamin West at the close of this voyage, was not the only meeting of tender interest. Benjamin's oldest brother Thomas, a man forty years old, now met his father for the first time in his life. Shortly after John West's first marriage in 1724, he left England to explore Pennsylvania, before he should settle in the new land with his wife. In his absence his eldest son was born and his wife died at her son's birth. The new little life was cared for by relations of the family, who begged to be allowed to keep the child, to whom they had become devoted. Mr. West remained in America and married again. He returned to England with Miss Shewell after an absence of forty years.

The father and son therefore had the unique experience of meeting each other for the first time in their lives. West has put his father and half-brother Thomas into his picture, "Penn's Treaty with the Indians." On September 2, 1765, Benjamin West and his faithful bride were married in the Church of Saint Martin's-in-the-Field. Mrs. West was received with great kindness by the King and Queen and was known at Court as the "Beautiful American." If Robert Browning required any justification for the much disputed theory he maintains, in an exaggerated form, in his poem, "The Statue and the Bust" and illustrates by his character, "Pompilia" he could find it in the love romance of Benjamin West and his wife.

Elizabeth Shewell and her brother were never reconciled. Many years after her flight and marriage, when West was in the height of his success, he painted a portrait of his wife in her "silver age." Mrs. West sent it to her brother as a peace offering, but he refused to look at it, and until his death it was kept

unopened in the attic. While she suffered injustice at her brother's hands, her descendants have justified her action. Among them is the author Leigh Hunt, who was the son of Mrs. West's niece, and the artist Frederic MacMonnies, the maker of the statue of Nathan Hale, in the City Hall Park, New York, and the MacMonnies fountain at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. They are proud to own as an ancestress a woman who had the insight to see that the spiritual ties of affection are deeper than the ties of blood kin, and that loyalty to him is more imperative, because the former are voluntarily entered into with one whom you freely choose to love, while the latter are thrust upon you by necessary relationships and may have no spiritual justification for their existence, and they honor the memory of her who was strong enough to live out her convictions.



V.

WEST SETTLES IN ENGLAND. HIS RELATION TO AMERICA.

“Not all the waters of that ocean, which divides, but cannot divorce them, can wash out of the consciousness of either nation (England and America), the feeling that we hold our intellectual property in common, that we owe allegiance to the same moral and literary traditions and that the fame of those who have shed lustre on our race, as it is an undivided inheritance, so it imposes an equal debt of gratitude, an equal responsibility on the two great branches of it.”—LOWELL.

ON his way back from Italy, West went to England with no other intention than to visit America's “old home.” But circumstances, over which he had no control and which played so large a part in West's life, once again became potent and changed his whole future history. England now became his life home. He did not see America again. The factors which thus changed his life plan were two. One was the low condition of public taste on matters of art. England had partly written her book of deeds. She had written less of the book of her



Engraved by W. E. Tucker

CHRIST HEALING THE SICK IN THE TEMPLE

West

words. The book of her art she had hardly begun. "Artists stood," says Galt, "lower in the scale of society than actors, for Garrick had redeemed the profession of the latter from degradation." Reynolds at this time was only a portrait painter, for the public taste encouraged no more. Garrick, one day, told West a story of the Artist Hogarth, which too sadly illustrated the condition of fine arts in England. When Hogarth had published the plates of his "Election Procession," he tried to sell the paintings. His plan was to do it by a raffle of two hundred chances, at two guineas the stake. A day was fixed when the subscribers should assemble at the artist's house to throw for their chances. From about one hundred subscribers, Garrick was the only one who came to take his chance. The artist was pained and irritated, but insisted that Garrick should go through the form of throwing the dice. Garrick reluctantly consented, but refused to take the paintings with him, promising to send for them. On his return home the actor sent the artist a note, saying that he could not remove

the paintings without sending a money consideration, but, knowing that any offer of money would be refused, he had placed, at his bankers, two hundred guineas at the disposal of Hogarth or his heirs, which would remain whether it was then accepted or not. Thus the low condition of public taste and England's need was the invitation to West, to remain and help educate the taste and meet the need.

The other influence that kept West in England was the somewhat remarkable encouragement which men like Markham, Newton, Johnson, Burke, Garrick, Goldsmith, Reynolds and especially Archbishop Drummond gave to so young a man. Their encouragement was earnest in proportion as the public taste was low. Their importunity became West's opportunity. Drummond attempted to raise a yearly salary for West that he might give his time to historical painting. When this failed, he felt the failure as a stigma on his country and became more earnest in his devotion to West. He now saw no way of engrafting a taste for the fine arts on the British public, unless they secured

the patronage of King George the Third. One night, at dinner, Drummond read to West the passage from Tacitus which describes "Agrip-pina landing with the ashes of Germanicus," and asked him to paint the scene. The next morning West returned with a sketch of it. When it was finished the King was asked to see it, and Drummond told him the story of its rapid production. The King thought he had discovered a genius. The king read to West a passage from Livy, describing the "final departure of Regulus from Rome," and asked him to paint it. From this time George the Third, bestowed on West his exclusive patronage and made him historical painter to the King.

When Reynolds and West withdrew from an art association, because of the bitter jealousy among the artists, the King asked the reason, and proposed that he would start one for West and his friends. It would be the Royal Academy. In that conversation this great institution was born. West and the King drew up the plans, and without his knowledge

or consent, Reynolds was selected as its first president. West succeeded Reynolds as its second president. When he was elected the King wished to confer on him the honor of Knighthood. He refused it on the ground that, being already so well known, it would add nothing to his name and fame. In his reply to the King, he said: "The chief value of titles is, that they serve to preserve, in families, a respect for those principles by which such distinctions were originally obtained. But simple Knighthood to a man, who is at least already as well known as he could ever hope to be from that honor, is not a legitimate object of ambition." This act shows not only his sincerity of character, which the King liked, but also that he had proved worthy of the confidence which the best men of the nation had placed in him. The Royal Academy expressed appreciation of West's long service, as its president, by presenting to him, late in life, a gold medal, now owned by William P. West, of Philadelphia. A cut of this medal appears on the cover of this book.

It was in connection with the Royal Academy and under the patronage and suggestion of the King that West painted most of his pictures. It was these two influences, the need of the British public, and the help from a few great men, that formed the tide in West's affairs which led him on to fortune. It must not be thought that the good fortune of circumstances, so prominent in West's life, was a blind fate which accounts for his success. He took the flood at its tide. He met the opportunity with marked ability, and one of the elements of greatness, in his life, is that rare judgment, so necessary to success in any profession, which understands the value of a thing when he sees it, and rightly estimates the worth of an opportunity. It is only when destiny and character unite, as George Meredith teaches in his novels, that you find a successful life such as West's. Because of the rare opportunity, which England offered him, and his own marked ability and pure character, West's life was one long record of success and peace. His end was in keeping with his life. The quiet of his artistic little

home in Bedford street, Covent Garden, which Leigh Hunt describes for us, was not disturbed until his wife, the object of his love for sixty years, died, December 6, 1817. Twenty-seven months later the artist "fell on sleep," at the age of eighty-two years. His pall-bearers were artists, statesmen and noblemen. He was laid to rest in the southeast corner of St. Paul's Cathedral, near the graves of Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Christopher Wren. Near by have since been laid the bodies of Millais, Landseer and Turner. His life-story reads like a fairy tale, for, as Hawthorne says, it was a wonderful transformation from that of a little unknown Quaker lad, in the wilds of America, to that of the most distinguished painter of his day. The transformation was affected by West's making the highest use of his natural abilities, and this is the lesson of his life. West was simple and natural in his tastes all his life. He was fond of out-door sport. He often went fishing with Sir Humphrey Davy. General Howe thought him the finest skater in America, and when West went

to London, Howe's praises of his skill as a skater, which West demonstrated, attracted the attention of many persons who came to sit for their portraits. The peace and success of his life were attained because he followed the footpaths which Henry Van Dyke points out, as the way to it, and which have a fitting application to West. "To be glad of life because it gives you the chance to love, and to work, and to play, and to look up to the stars, to be satisfied with your possessions, but not content with yourself, till you have made the best of them. To despise nothing in the world except falsehood and meanness, and to fear nothing except cowardice; to be governed by your admirations rather than by your disgusts; to covet nothing that is your neighbor's except his kindness of heart and gentleness of manners; to think seldom of your enemies, often of your friends and every day of Christ, and to spend as much time as you can with body and with spirit in God's out-of-doors. These are little guideposts on the footpath to peace."

West's relation to King George the Third and to his native land, during the Revolutionary War, is a matter of deep interest. He retained the friendship of the King and the good opinion of his American friends by remaining neutral. He talked freely with the King about the war and supplied him with valuable information, among which was doubtless the opinion prevailing in America, that Washington took charge of the American army with the hope and purpose of affecting a reconciliation. But a letter with this object was not laid before the King and Privy Council until six weeks after it was received and then it was too late. It must be remembered that West was technically not an American citizen, but always a British subject. For West left America before American citizenship had been established, or the War of Independence fought. Hence he was in reality never anything else than a subject of the King. King George the Third was sitting to West for his portrait when a messenger brought him the Declaration of American Independence.

He was agitated at first, said West afterwards to Samuel Morse, then sat silent and thoughtful. At length the King said : “ Well if they cannot be happy under my government I hope they may not change it for a worse. I wish them no ill.” This remark of the King will explain why his friendship for West was not broken because of West’s love for his native land.

West did not remain aloof from the war that followed because he was opposed to bearing arms. He was not unacquainted with the manual of the soldier. After the destruction of Braddock’s army he enlisted and became captain of a company of sharp-shooters, in a regiment raised in Chester County by Colonel Wayne, and in company with the Colonel’s son, afterwards “ Mad ” Anthony Wayne, he assisted in taking Fort Dusquesne (Pittsburg) and then went with General Forbes in search of the relics of Braddock’s army through the forests. Nor did West refrain from the war because he did not sympathize with the American cause. He was a decided republican. He was often

suspected of leaning to his native side in politics. He was a warm admirer of the republican chief, Napoleon. He kept it no secret. During Napoleon's triumph he went to Paris to pay him his respects. Napoleon in turn admired his pictures. After Napoleon's downfall, West still retained the love he had for the "first consul;" "it was a wedded love," says Leigh Hunt, "for better, for worse." While West was a soldier and a republican, he saw that to take sides in the war, meant an interruption of his life work. His mission to art was too important to be sacrificed. He therefore remained neutral. But while he was neutral, his love for his native land did not burn low. He was especially kind to American students in London. His talents and purse were at their service. Indeed his liberality to them impaired his fortune. West's kindness to brother artists and his freedom from jealousy is beautifully illustrated by the story of the reconciliation which he effected between King George the Third and the well-known engraver, Sir Robert Strange, without which

Strange's life-work would have been ruined. Perhaps his feeling to America is best illustrated by his picture, "Christ healing the sick," a cut of which is here given. Some Friends in Philadelphia decided to build a hospital for the sick poor, which was built at Ninth and Spruce Streets and known as the Pennsylvania Hospital. They applied to West for a contribution. He replied, that he was unable to give money, but would paint a picture, to be placed in the hospital. He wrote to Samuel Coates, under date of July 8, 1801, that he had chosen a subject appropriate to the situation taken from Matthew *xxi*, 14, 15, where Christ's healing the sick is described. When the picture was finished, it attracted so much attention that the British Institution offered him three thousand guineas for it. He accepted, on condition that he could make a copy of it for the hospital. The returns from the exhibition of it in America were so great that the hospital was enlarged for the reception of thirty new patients. For thirty years it was a source of revenue to the hospital, during

which time it hung in a building especially prepared for it. For sixteen years past it has hung in the clinic room, inspiring medical men with a sense of their high calling. A new chapel building is now being erected in which the picture will be hung. The size of the picture is ten by sixteen feet.

This picture not only illustrates West's kindness of heart and love of native land, but also one of his characteristic faults as a painter, which it would be well to notice before proceeding to examine his other pictures, even if it seems like sacrilege to point it out in connection with the picture's worthy purpose. For West's place in the history of art will not be benefited by being blind to his faults. We can be admirers without being partisans.

There are upwards of forty figures introduced into this picture, and one is astonished that amidst all this variety there should be so little variation. Two-thirds of the figures are duplicates of the others. The whole seems to have been modeled from five or six figures and then placed on the canvas with little power, for

the artist has placed the greater number of his counterpart countenances in juxtaposition, so that you feel you are looking at a large family group. The aged persons are repetitions in form and feature of one another ; so are the men and women and children. The figure who with bended knee and outstretched hands, has so awkwardly let go his hold of the cripple, is brother to the man who appears above his head supporting the woman, and between the head of the sick woman and that of her supporter there is a woman's face which is a verisimilitude of the woman who has the crutch of the cripple in her hand. The woman who has the child on her knee is sister to the blind woman, whose head appears over her. Behind the supporter of the cripple are two youths who are intended to appear in earnest conversation, but their countenances are inane. One critic says, that if it had been West's idea that sickness and disease ran only in certain families, and that almost all the members were afflicted with paralysis or blindness or lameness, he could not have told his story more effectually.

Eight or nine figures on the canvas would have told the story West had in mind just as well. The others are not needed and therefore are a blemish. Yet with all its defects, Hawthorne was right when he said of it, that "if Benjamin West had done no other good deed than this, yet it would have been enough to entitle him to an honorable remembrance forever. At this very day there are thirty poor people, in the hospital, who owe all their comforts to that same picture."



From Photo by Soule

KING LEAR

West



VI.

WEST'S PORTRAIT PAINTINGS.

“Human portraits faithfully drawn are of all portraits the welcomest on human walls—CARLYLE.

WEST'S works are numerous. They have been estimated to exceed three thousand, and a calculation has shown that were all his works collected together, it would require a gallery eight hundred feet long, fifty feet broad and twenty feet high, to contain them. As one begins to examine this long list of paintings, he cannot help wondering why so few of them are generally known and loved, why so few copies of them hang upon the walls of our homes. If one sought an answer to this question he would soon discover that, while West had a fine imagination and a fine eye for the best historical situations, as the subjects of his pictures show, yet the constant demands on his imagination weakened it. For fifty years he presented a new painting to the

annual exhibition in London, without an omission. No man can paint three thousand pictures in one life time and do it well. West had the same greed that Sir Walter Scott had, to do two days work in one. The result in both cases was the same, a prodigality of work, but a loss of inspiration and vitality, a degeneration from genius to talent.

West's reach exceeded his grasp, because he always had the best opinion of himself. In describing his visit to Paris to see the paintings, at once "the glory and shame of Bonaparte's administration," he says, "wherever I went men looked at me and ministers and people of state were constantly in my company. I was one day in the Louvre; all eyes were upon me and I could not help observing to Charles Fox who happened to be walking with me, how strong was the love of art and admiration of its professors, in France." "The complacent simplicity," says Galt, "which could imagine the public attention, to be exclusively directed to himself when there is no doubt, the great object of interest was the great statesman, who

accompanied him is sufficiently characteristic and amusing." It was West's conceit that led him to attempt too much. But he was faithful up to the limit of his abilities. The evidence of study and hard work in his pictures is apparent. This characteristic is well illustrated by a story told of his relation to Morse. The inventor of the telegraph was strongly attracted to art in his youth. He decided to become a painter and went to London, in 1811 with Allston to study in the Royal Academy under West. As a test of his fitness for a place as a student in the academy, he made a drawing of the cast of the "Dying Hercules," for which he afterwards received a gold medal. He took the drawing to West, who had been kind to him. West looked at it and handed it back saying only, "very well, go on and finish it." "It is finished," said Morse surprised. "Oh no," said the famous painter. "Look here, and here, and here," and he pointed out many unfinished places in the drawing. Morse somewhat mortified, spent a week in perfecting it. When he took it back, the venerable

academician only examined it briefly and said as before, "very well, go on and finish it." "Is it not finished?" asked Morse. "No," said West, "you have not marked the articulation of the finger joints, or this muscle, or that." Three days more were spent on the drawing and then it was taken back. "Very clever," said the implacable critic, "go on and finish it." "I cannot finish it," cried Morse, utterly discouraged. Then West smiled, satisfied. "Now you have learned your lesson and I have tried you long enough. It is not half finished beginnings, but one thorough drawing, that makes the artist; learn to finish one picture and you are a painter." West's principle stated to Morse, is indispensable and is in accord with Michael Angelo's dictum, "Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." Had West added to his finish of detail, passion and expression, he would have been a greater painter. It is because he had a genius for work and detail, but lacked the free play of genius that the first impression in looking at his pictures is the best. With any picture

of a great master, the reverse is true. It may be unattractive at first, but the more one studies it, the greater it becomes. It is like a great book which one must read and re-read and grow up to and perhaps never outgrow. West's pictures are like the books we can exhaust at the first reading and do not care to read again. True this is a high standard and it rules out the majority of West's paintings. A few approach it and deserve to be remembered. Excluding his pictures of mythological scenes, among the best of which are, "Orestes and Pylades before Iphigenia" and "Hector parting with Andromache, his wife, and Astyanax, his child," West's paintings may be said to fall into four general groups: Portrait paintings, Religious pictures, Lesser historical scenes and Greater historical scenes. The illustrations of each group here given, are among those pictures of West's which still live.

In regard to the first group, a brief word will suffice, for West was a historical not a portrait painter. The English speaking world has come to agree with Carlyle that: "Human

portraits faithfully drawn are of all portraits the welcomest on human walls." And the poet painter George Frederic Watts has done more than any other artist of this century to raise this branch of art to its right place. But, while painters in West's day spent much time in painting portraits, portrait painting was not what Watts has made it to be, a portrayal of the central feature of each soul, on the outward form and features. If we want a real portrait, that is, among English artists, we will not go back of Watts. Tennyson once asked Watts to describe his notion of what a true portraitist should be. The reply so impressed the poet that he embodied it in his "Idylls of the King."

"As when a painter, poring on a face
Divinely, thro' all hindrance, finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and color of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best."

West began his work as a portrait painter and some of his portraits are worthy of note, among which is his portrait of General Washington. There is one ideal portrait of West's

which approaches the merit of Watts. For the outward form and inward spirit correspond. It is his "King Lear"—a cut of which is given. The original is now in the Boston Athenæum. The situation is taken from the fourth scene of the third act of Shakespeare's play. The scene is on the heath before a hovel in the midst of a storm. The characters represented in the scene are, the fool who holds Lear's arm, Edgar disguised as a madman, sitting on the right, Kent who is crouching, Gloster with a torch and Lear in the center. Lear's soul is stamped in his face. His outward form befits the inner spirit which feels what Shakespeare represents him as saying :

" The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else,
Save what beats there.—Filial ingratitude !
Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to't?—But I will punish home :—
No I will weep no more.—In such a night
To shut me out !—Pour on ; I will endure :—
In such a night as this !

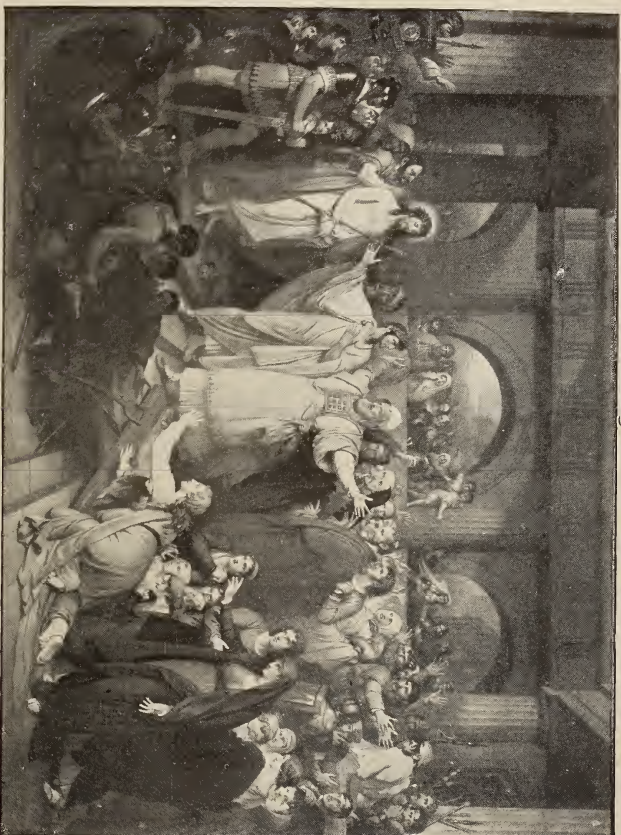


VII.

WEST'S RELIGIOUS PICTURES.

“What, let us ask, in the first place, was the task appointed for the fine arts on the threshold of the modern world? They had before all things to give form to the ideas evolved by Christianity and to embody a class of emotions unknown to the ancients.”—SYMONDS.

IN every great picture there are two elements. There is the subject matter and the technic, the idea and its expression. Of these two elements, the idea or sentiment sought to be embodied is the more important. The average man will agree with Coleridge of whom it is told that he would sometimes say after looking at a painting, “There is no use in stopping at this, for I see the painter had no idea, It is mere technical drawing.” While we agree with Coleridge in valuing most the idea of a picture, there ought to be no war between the idea and its execution. For in proportion as a painter values the thought he wishes to embody, in that proportion, he will spare no



Engraved by John Sartain

CHRIST REJECTED

West

pains in making his technic perfect. No painting can be called great unless it have both elements in the highest degree. It must have a great theme and it must be greatly executed. But the first place belongs to the soul or theme of a picture. What helped most to place the chief stress on the idea in a work of art was the introduction of Christianity to the world. Its message was of such moment as to furnish a new problem to artists. Symonds, in his "Renaissance in Italy," very strikingly illustrates this problem by asking why it was that Christian artists gave up sculpture and adopted painting? For sculpture had been the characteristic art of un-Christian Greece, while painting became the characteristic art of Christian Italy. In substance the reason he gives for the change is because Christian ideas demanded the chief place over mere technic. The Greek life gloried in the beauty of the body, in the happy life of this present world. Sculpture with its composure and its capacity to represent a perfect body was adapted to express the joyous life of the Greeks. But between the best days

of Greek art and the best days of Italian art, the new force of Christianity, which had come into the world, taught men to despise the body and this present world, or rather to value them less than the life of the future and the struggles of the spirit. Christianity disturbed the peace of the joyous Greek life. It taught men to look within, to center their attention on the soul rather than on the body. The problem, therefore, set the Italian artist was to portray the beauty of the soul not the beauty of the body, to picture the soul in its struggles, aspirations, longings and achievements, to illustrate the spiritual rather than the physical nature of man. When the Italian artist began this task he found sculpture incapable of expressing the conceptions of life to which Christianity gave birth. For, as Hawthorne expresses it, "in any sculptural subject there ought to be a moral standstill since there must of necessity be a physical one. Otherwise it is like flinging a block of marble up into the air and by some trick of enchantment causing it to stick there. You feel that it

ought to come down and are dissatisfied with it that it does not obey the natural law." To painting there is no similar objection, Symonds goes on to show, for painting, with its color and shadow, its perspective, its grouping, its play of feature, its landscapes, and their sympathy with human nature, its power to express emotion, became the art of Italy because it was capable of expressing the truths of Christianity. The Greek hero of necessity had a vigorous body and could be represented in sculpture. The Christian hero, like Stephen could be a hero and steadfast unto death, without any physical charm. The struggle with him was within his own soul. His spiritual heroism could be best represented by painting. The Greek art while not unspiritual yet rejoiced in physical beauty. Christian art, at its best, while not despising physical beauty made it secondary and rejoiced in soul beauty.

The problem of the Christian artist, so well and fully treated by Symonds, Benjamin West understood and accepted as his own. That he understood it, is seen first of all, from his

lectures on art. The foregoing remarks fairly represent and may be taken as a brief summary of the whole spirit of his numerous and lengthy lectures delivered as the President of the Royal Academy, to its students. That he understood this problem may be seen also from the number of his religious paintings. He painted the entire history of revealed religion, in thirty-eight pictures, painted for the King's Chapel at Windsor where they are still to be seen. His merit as a religious painter may best be tested by placing one of these pictures, his "Last Supper," side by side with two acknowledged masterpieces which deal with the same subject. Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Sarto have each left us a picture of the "Last Supper." These three pictures represent the same moment of time, the moment when the disciples asked one by one, "Is it I?" But each painter gives a different interpretation to the question, which may be taken to represent any one of several feelings on the part of the men who asked it. Da Vinci in his picture thinks it was spoken in

protest. The disciples asked, "Is it I?" in a tone of indignant protest against Christ's insinuation that one of them would betray him. Da Vinci makes them show their feeling of protest by the position of their hands. His picture becomes a secondary study of the language of the hand.

Del Sarto, in his picture, thinks the question, "Is it I?" was asked in the spirit of self-examination, in which the disciples put the question to themselves rather than to Christ and each looked into his own heart to see if he were capable of such a deed. Del Sarto makes the disciples express their feeling by the position of their feet. His picture is a study of the language of the feet.

West makes the disciples, in asking, "Is it I?" express not one common emotion, as Da Vinci and Del Sarto did, but the individual feeling and attitude of the disciples to the Master. He represents the confusion hinted at in Luke's report, "and they began to inquire among themselves which of them it was, that should do this thing." He makes them

express their feelings by their faces. His picture becomes a study of the language of the human face.

More particularly, West's conception of Judas may be compared to that of Del Sarto. Del Sarto's Judas is in keeping with the point of view of his picture and further illustrates it. He puts the key of Judas character in his face. He does not represent him as a hardened criminal, but his wonderful face is the face of a sensitive soul, who is capable of great good or great evil according as his love was well or ill received. It is the face of one who might have asked himself the question all his life long, "Is it I?" Which of these two tendencies in any nature is at last to have the upper hand? West represents him as the already hardened criminal, as the envious, dishonest and, at last, baffled and exposed treasurer of the little band, just about to go out, as represented by the picture, into the night, his congenial element.

The verdict of the world does not give West's picture a place beside Da Vinci's or

Del Sarto's, but that he understood the task set to him and met it up to the measure of his ability none can doubt.

That West understood the problem of the Christian artist, is perhaps best illustrated by his picture, "Christ rejected," a cut of which is here given. It was once owned by Mr. Harrison, of Philadelphia, but is now the property of the Academy of Fine Arts. This picture is what West called an "epic of Christ's trial and death." In it, as he said, "he attempted, a delineation of nearly the whole scale of human passions from the basest to those that partake most of the divine nature." A study of the picture shows that he put on canvas every fact which the four Evangelists record, in connection with Christ's trial.

On the left of the picture are the Roman soldiers who have Jesus in Custody. They bear the standard of the Emperor Tiberius, thus showing the date of the events. At their head is the Centurion with his family. Next to him is Christ, whom West said he tried to represent as showing^u divine composure and

sustained by the thought of the grandeur of the end for which He came into the world. In a position of humiliation, yet triumphant, just as Sodoma in his "Christ tied to pillar," represents Him. Next to Christ is Pilate. The wreath of laurel on his head shows him to be the Roman Emperor's representative. He is in the act of asking the people: "Shall I release unto you this man or Barabbas?" Next to him is the High Priest Caiaphas, who is the most spirited figure in the group. He is in the act of crying: "We have no King but Caesar! Away with him! Crucify him!" Behind the High Priest is a mob of people, who are discussing the event and revealing their feelings by looks and gestures. In the front of this mob stand Joseph of Arimathea, who bore a tender love for Christ, James the Less, a young man who manifests great anxiety for the outcome of the trial, and Peter, who, having denied his Master and wept bitterly, has returned. On the extreme right of this central line of figures is Barabbas, the murderer and two thieves, attended by the officers who have

just brought them from confinement. On the left of the foreground sits the executioner, on the cross. Back of him are two soldiers waiting for further commands. In front of him are two boys, to whom he explains the implements of execution, illustrating his remarks by showing them where the nail goes into the feet. In the middle of the foreground is Mary Magdalene, who is so filled with terror and so far forgets her sex, as to fall upon the cross and reach out her arm to Christ. Back of her sits the third Mary with her hands clasped in emotion. Around her are the women of Galilee, who wept for Christ in the "Via Dolorosa" and to whom He said: "Weep not for me, ye daughters of Israel, but rather weep for yourselves." In the midst of these, stands John the beloved disciple, supporting the mother of Jesus. This act anticipates what Christ said to him on the cross: "Behold thy mother!" and to her: "Woman behold thy son!" thus commending His mother to John's especial care. In the central gallery is Herod with his men of court and war. With him is Pilate's

wife. Her presence with Herod represents the reconciliation between Herod and Pilate, which the trial of Jesus had brought about. She is present also because she had suffered many things in a dream on account of this just person. The preparation for the scourging and crucifixion is indicated by the man who is removing Christ's robe and the man back of him, who holds the scourge in his hands.

It will thus be seen that the artist tries to portray "the whole scale of human passions, by putting all the circumstances of Christ's trial in one picture. This is his usual fault of attempting too much. One or two human passions would be enough for one canvas. Raphael's technic is remarkable for one reason among others, because the paint on his canvasses is so thin. West's pictures would be greater, if he too had spared his paint and made the figures in his pictures fewer.

But this picture is undoubted one of West's best. And one element of its greatness is the fact, that the chief figure in the painting is not Christ, but the High Priest. This shows

West's insight in that he grasped one of the chief revelations of Calvary. "On that day human hands frantically strove to destroy human hope. Men would have killed God if hate, blindness, greed and cowardice could have done it. They turned with rage on the one Helper among all the helpers who had not only light for the mind but life for the soul. And the most awful aspect of this denial and crucifixion of the Divine, lay in the fact that the Roman was only the executioner of the will of the Jew. Christ was rejected not by the world but by the Church. Not by moral outcasts, but by Priests, Pharisees, and Scribes." One of the significant features of the rejection of Christ is the light which it throws on the capacity of the human heart to sin, and West has rightly so represented it in this picture.

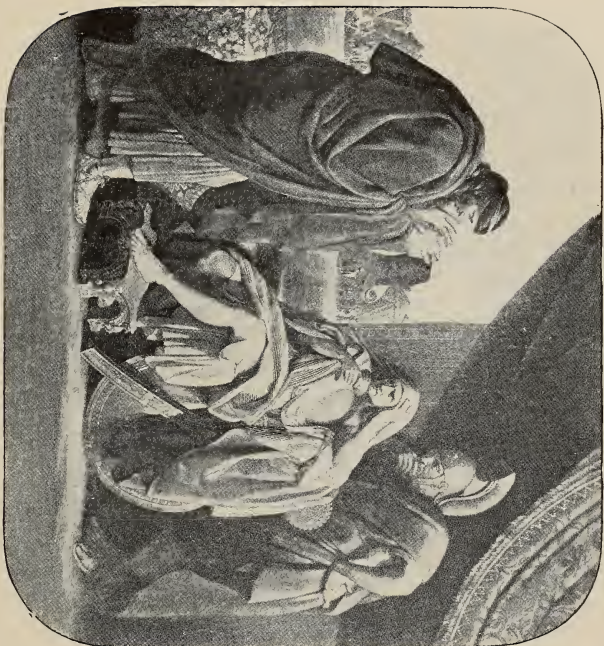


VIII.

WEST'S LESSER HISTORICAL SCENES.

“ To learn not only by a comet's rush,
But a rose's birth.”—BROWNING.

“**S**TUDY your Plutarch and paint,” was the advice given by David, the great French classicist to his pupil Gros. Without the advice of a great teacher, West, as early as his Philadelphia days, began the study of Plutarch. And if West had been asked to make a list of the books which had most influenced him, Plutarch's Lives, would have stood near the head of the list. “He was one of Plutarch's men,” has frequently been said at the funeral of great statesmen because his character has matched the characters of the men whose life story Plutarch has so well told. In a real sense West may be said to be “one of Plutarch's men.” For it was Plutarch who suggested to West to attempt historical composition and what Plutarch's



Engraved by Green

ALEXANDER AND HIS PHYSICIAN

West

genius did with the pen, by portraying the heroic and noble traits of human nature in the lives of great men, West attempted to do with the brush, in his historical pictures. West was very fond of selecting a romantic or touching or characteristic event in the life of a great man and making it the subject of a picture. He had a genius for selecting such subjects. As an artist, one of his great aims was to be a story teller. Of this type of picture he has left us a great number, some of which are well known and worthy of mention. The picture of "Alfred the Great dividing his last loaf with the pilgrim," is a good illustration of this class. The picture represents a characteristic scene in the life of a man who was perhaps England's greatest king. So great has been his influence on England that in 1849, his birthday was celebrated after a lapse of a thousand years and next year the thousandth anniversary of his death will be celebrated by magnificent ceremonies at Winchester, the old royal residence. Alfred was the creator of English literature. He founded

English public-schools. He made England a united country for the first time. He gave her the first conception of national law. He was the first ruler of Christendom who put aside every personal ambition to devote himself wholly to the welfare of those he ruled. It is the moral grandeur of his character that constitutes his real greatness. "So long as I have lived," he wrote, "I have striven to live worthily." "Day and night," says his biographer, "he was busied in the correction of local injustice, for in that whole kingdom the poor had no helpers or few, save the King himself." He was on intimate terms with his people and they loved him. When the country was overrun by Danes and Alfred was a wanderer over the moors, he was said to have entered a peasant's hut, and to have been bidden by the housewife, who did not recognize him, to turn the cakes which were baking on the hearth. The young king did as he was bidden, but in the sad thoughts which came over him, he forgot his task and bore in amused silence, the scolding of the good wife who

found her cakes spoiled on her return. It was at such a time as this that he divided his last loaf with the pilgrim whose need was no greater than his own. West has thus taken a characteristic and beautiful act in the life of the great king to commemorate by his picture.

Another picture of this class is, "Sir Philip Sidney giving a cup of water to a dying soldier." The story of how Sidney with a mortal wound received at the battle of Zutphen and fainting from loss of blood, refused the draught offered to his own lips in order to give it to a dying man whose necessities, he said, were greater than his own, is too well known to need repetition. West's picture helps to keep alive the memory of a characteristic act in the life of the English model of knightly virtues. Sidney's act illustrates his own definition of a true gentleman, "a man with high erected thoughts seated in a heart of courtesy."

Another illustration of this type of picture is, "Lord Clive receiving the Duana from the hand of the Mogul." Duana is the Italian form of the word given in our dictionaries as

dewani, the office of a dewan or finance minister especially as vested in the East India Company by letters delivered to Clive. The picture is designed to commemorate the service Clive did for England in India.

Robert Clive went to India as a clerk in the East India Company, whose business operations at that time were not large. The French, who were trying to expel Englishmen from India, besieged Madras in 1746 and took the English merchants and clerks prisoners. Clive, who was among them, escaped in disguise. He did not return to his desk as a clerk, but joined a company of soldiers. In 1751, this young unknown clerk, now a private soldier, proposed a daring scheme, by which he, with a few hundred English and Sepoys gained a signal victory over thousands of French and their Indian allies, at Arcot.

Clive's broken health now brought him to England. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War he returned to India as an officer. He had only been in Madras a few months when he was stirred to action by a crime which is

one of the notable monuments to "man's inhumanity to man." Surajah Dowlah, the Master of Bengal, jealous of the wealth of the English traders, and roused by the French, seized Fort William, afterwards Calcutta, took its settlers as prisoners, and thrust one hundred and fifty of them into a small prison called the Black Hole of Calcutta. The guard room was hardly twenty feet square. In the heat of an Indian summer, and in the madness of thirst, the prisoners trampled each other to death. The next morning only twenty-three remained alive. At the news of the crime Clive sailed with one thousand Englishmen and two thousand Sepoys, and with this small force he met an army of fifty thousand foot and fourteen thousand horse on the plains of Plassey. On the eve of battle a council of war counselled retreat because the odds were too great. Clive's courage did not falter. He ordered an attack. His small force came off complete victors. The victory of Plassey, under Clive, gave India to England. West's picture commemorates a triumphant scene in the life of a man whose

unique bravery did so much for his native land. A better monument to Clive's memory than West's picture, is Robert Browning's poem, "Clive." The poem gives a true portrait of the man. The stirring incident in Clive's life, told by Browning, shows him to be a man whose only fear was the fear of meanness.

The picture, selected as an illustration of this class,—a cut of which is here given—is "Alexander and his Physician." The scene represented in this picture West got from Plutarch. Alexander the Great was sick in Cilicia during one of his earlier campaigns for Asiatic conquest. The fate of the world seemed to pivot on his recovery. Because of the magnitude of the risk involved and of the suspicions of intrigue on every side, the Macedonian physicians refused to assume responsibility for his treatment. But Philip, an Acarnanian physician, loved Alexander, and was loved in turn. He came to the King's bedside. Philip resolved to care for Alexander at every risk to himself. Meantime, Parmenio, a jealous admirer of Alexander, had written from the camp saying,

that the physician Philip had been bribed by Darius to poison him, and warning him to beware of Philip. Alexander read the letter, showed it to no one and put it under his pillow. When Philip proffered the medicine he had prepared, Alexander looked up into the face of his friend with a cheerful expression of trust. He drained the cup without a question, having handed the letter to Philip that he might read it in the meantime and learn how a friend could trust. West's picture represents Alexander taking the medicine and Philip reading the letter. The picture illustrates one of the essential elements of a true friendship,—its perfect trust.

These are only a few of the many pictures of the type which West painted. Whatever may be said of his skill in their execution, it must be granted that as a story-teller, he has done what Plutarch has done, he has helped to create faith in the capacity of human nature for noble deeds. He has taught us to be governed by our "admiration not by our disgusts." And by selecting the little commonplace incidents

in the lives of great men as the subjects for his pictures, he taught us to emphasize such incidents as the true tests of a man's worth. "Great occasions rally great principles and brace the mind to a lofty bearing, a bearing that is even above itself. But trials that make no occasion at all, leave it to show the goodness and beauty it has in its own disposition." West thus set himself against the belief, held by eminent French artists of his day, that "the common round of daily task" was not a fit subject for art. By his lesser historical scenes, West helped, even if a little, the new revolution in the art of this century, by which artists as well as other men have learned—

"To have to do with nothing but the true
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone
In the main current of the general life,
But small experiences of every day
Concerns of the particular hearth and home ;
To learn not only by a comet's rush
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God
But the comfort, Christ."



Engraved by William Woollett

DEATH OF GENERAL WOLFE

West



IX.

WEST'S GREATER HISTORICAL SCENES.

"Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?"—BROWNING.

"THE artist," said Goethe, "is conditioned on the man." Water cannot rise above its level. And no work of art is greater than the man who produced it. As one looks at West's paintings he sees that everything is correct, chaste and pleasing, but they lack strength and the free play of genius. His work, with all his care for workmanship and diligence for perfection, is lacking in something, a something that is needed to give it vitality. We call it the secret of art, a spiritual passion, magical, vague, and yet strong. It is hard to define, but we know it by its presence or absence. A work of art, be it a poem or picture, if it have not this secret may charm us for a moment, but soon it leaves us as cold as before.

To understand the absence of this secret in West's work we must look at the man. For his work is a revelation of his own life. He had the misfortune to be without suffering. His experience brought no trials to develop and strengthen his spirituality. He was too early successful. The Kings exclusive patronage was not a blessing but a misfortune. His nature was not intense but negative. His life was regular, orderly, industrious and successful. His work was the natural fruit of such a life. It has a body but no soul. A beautiful body indeed, but dead. For an illustration of this estimate of West, compare his work with that of Millet. The secret of any great life, and any great work as well, is love, sympathy, suffering, struggle for truth, spiritual reality. These elements Millet has. They are what West has not. There is the same difference between West and Millet that there is between Haydn and Mozart. The same difference in their lives. The same difference in their work.

The secret of a great work of art, which Millet has and West has not, may be stated in

a still different way. It is what Carlyle calls "sincerity." In his essay on Burns we see that he meant by sincerity, the power to speak freely and fearlessly the personal convictions of his own heart untrammelled by conventionalities. This is a rare quality in poet or painter. Burns and Browning are among the few such poets. Millet was such a painter. Rose Kingsley in her excellent account of the struggle between the Classicists and Romantists in France, sums it up by saying, "What we learn from the spectacle, deeply interesting, deeply instructive, deeply edifying in its history and achievements, is, that the only thing in art that really matters, the only thing that bears weight, the only thing that leaves its mark on the age, and on all ages to come, is individual genius—the mind of the one man who is great enough to stand alone, to be himself, to give to the world that message which is in him to give." Whenever a painter's feeling about an experience or object in life or nature has become living passion of his own soul and he paints it in such a way as to make

you see what he sees and feel what he feels, then it is a true work of art. He paints not from hearsay but from experience. The passion he portrays first glows in his own heart. If "every good book is the life blood of its author's spirit," so ought a painting to be. If a painting is to be called great it must be painted according to the dictum of Horace, "If you wish me to weep, your own heart must first be wrung." While West broke away from conventionality in matters of dress, the subjects of his paintings had not become passions of his own soul.

But because West falls short when compared with the great world painters, this does not mean that he was not a good or even a great painter. He will be known in history as a historical painter. He did for historical painting in his day what Watts has done for portrait painting in ours, he made it a new and a real thing. Perhaps the first necessity in any great work of art is to have a great subject. West's rare, good judgment always selected a great theme for his paintings, and if the selec-



Engraved by John Hall

PENN'S TREATY WITH THE INDIANS IN 1681

West

tion of good themes would make a great painter, West would stand among the best. He always selected, for his historical pictures, some crucial, epoch-making event in history, which men would always care to remember and which his pictures would help to make vivid. To the truth of this statement a few of his well known historical paintings bear ample testimony.

Among them should be mentioned his picture "Penn's treaty with the Indians," now in the old State House at Philadelphia. The picture commemorates an event as beautiful as it is important in its consequences through all the history of the new colony in America. Voltaire said, that the treaty which was concluded between the Indians and William Penn was the first public contract which connected the old and new worlds together. And, though not ratified by oaths, is still the only treaty that has never been broken.

Another picture in point, is West's "Cromwell dissolving the long Parliament." The Parliament was called "long" because after

it was convened by Charles I., it held almost continuous sessions for twenty years. During the latter part of this time Colonel Pride purged it of all members who would not bring the King to justice. It then numbered about sixty members and was called in derision the Rump Parliament. It was the Rump Parliament that Cromwell dissolved with his soldiers. No man in English history is more misunderstood than is Cromwell. On one hand he is lauded as a patriot and saviour of his country, on the other he is denounced as a hypocrite and betrayer of the Puritan cause. To this day his place in history is not fixed.

And no act in his career is more discussed than his dissolution of Parliament. After the long struggle of the Puritan for liberty and reform, in which Cromwell played a leading part at the head of his regiment, "Old Ironsides," who "trusted in God and kept their powder dry" and who were never defeated in battle, and when Cromwell was now the real dictator of England, he needed a Parliament to carry out the reforms for which the Puritans

had shed their blood. The Rump Parliament refused to do it for them and for all their fighting offered only a piece of paper. Cromwell said "No." He entered Parliament at the head of his soldiers, as West's picture represents him as doing, expelled the members by force, locked the doors and put the keys in his pocket. During the night a wag nailed a placard on the door bearing the inscription in large letters, "This house to let, unfurnished."

Cromwell's act was against all law and order and precedent, but in the judgment of many, a necessity in a good cause. Carlyle, his first great defender, thinks it was a harsh measure but justified. John Milton, the poet, who was a clerk in the Rump Parliament and saw everything at close hand, commends him for it. On the other hand many look on this act as the turning point, the "Crossing of the Rubicon," in his well deserved political downfall. West's good judgment has thus siezed upon, for the subject of his picture, a crucial event in the life of a great man and the history of a good cause. Among West's greater historical pic-

tures, "The battle of La Hogue" holds a prominent place. The scene represents the battle which was fought in 1692, off Cape La Hogue, a headland on the English channel, in Normandy, France, between fifty French vessels under Tourville and ninety vessels, both Dutch and English, under Russell. The French were completely beaten and most of their vessels burned, one after the other, under the eyes of a French army of thirty thousand.

This victory for England was significant because it meant that William of Orange was secure on the English throne, and that the cause of James I., in whose interest the French were fighting, was dead. This victory made England the mistress of the seas. West's painting is not the only monument to this victory. Of late years additional interest has been added to it by one of Browning's most popular ballads, called "Herve Riel." The poem was first published in the Cornhill Magazine, in 1871, and is now familiar to every school boy. For it, Browning received five hundred dollars which he gave to relieve the suffering in Paris,

caused by the Franco-German war. Dr. Furnival and Kenneth Grahme have investigated the records at Paris and have found that the brave and touching story narrated in the poem is a true one. Herve Riel, a simple Briton sailor, when the commanders, after the defeat of La Hogue, had decided to run the remaining twenty-two ships on shore and fire them, in order to save them from the English, Herve Riel stepped forward and protested, "Sirs, believe me, there's a way ! only let me lead the line." He was given supreme command, and right skilfully did he pilot the ships through the shallows of the Rance and save them for France.

"Out burst all with one accord,
This is Paradise for Hell !
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing."

For this splendid service he was permitted to ask for any reward he chose to name. The brave Briton wanted no reward for duty done and asked only for one whole day's holiday to go home and see his wife, the " Belle Aurore." Herve Riel is one of the unknown heroes of

this historic battle, to whose memory Browning's poem is the best monument.

The picture of this class which is best known and most noteworthy is "The death of General Wolfe." The painting represents the death of Wolfe at Quebec when he fought the French under Montcalm. It was a stroke of originality for West to put an Indian in the picture who watches to see whether the heroism of Wolfe equalled that of his own race. West made a minor mistake about the Indian's dress which he did not know he had made until it was too late to correct it. He has represented the Indian with naked feet, and an Indian warrior never goes into battle without his moccasins. The night before the battle Wolfe was reading Gray's "Elegy" and quoted to a brother officer the lines :

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Await alike the inevitable hour,
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

I would rather be the author of that poem, he said, than to have the glory of beating the French to-morrow. The last lines of this quo-

tation he verified the next day, for both he and Montcalm died within a few hours of each other. But his victory was won and this victory at Quebec gave America to England, broke the power of France in the new world and established the reformed religion on this continent. West's picture of this scene richly deserves to be remembered, for in it he made the first attempt made in England to represent a modern historical event exactly as it occurred. Up to this time painters had painted English and French soldiers in the costume of antiquity, in that of Greeks and Romans. Most portrait painters, Gainsborough being a marked exception, represented their sitters as Psyches and Cupids. This was false taste. In Kipling's first novel "The light that failed" occurs a strong passage, protesting against the same false British taste against which West made his protest. It is a conversation between Torpenhow and his friend Dick, the artist, in which is contrasted a picture as it ought to be painted, true to life, with a picture that pleases the British public. Torpenhow says to Dick,

“You’ve learnt something while you have been away (in Egypt). Give ’em what they know and when you’ve done it once do it again.” Dick dragged forward a canvass laid face to the wall. “Here’s a sample of real art. It’s going to be a facsimile reproduction for a weekly. I called it ‘His last shot.’ It’s worked up from a little water color I made outside Il Maghrib. Well, I lured my model, a beautiful rifleman, up here with drink. I drored him and I redrored him and I tre-drored him, and I made him a flushed, dishev-elled, bedevilled scalawag, with his helmet on the back of his head, and the living fear of death in his eye and the blood oozing out of a cut over his ankle-bone. He wasn’t pretty but was all soldier and very much man. * * I did him just as well at I knew how, making allowance for the slickness of oils. Then the art manager of that abandoned paper said, that his subscribers wouldn’t like it. It was brutal and coarse and violent, man being naturally gentle when fighting for his life. They wanted something more restful, with a little more

color. I might have said a good deal, but you might as well talk to a sheep as an art manager. I took my "Last shot" back. Behold the result. I put him in a pretty red coat, without a speck on it. That is art. I polished his boots, observe the high light on the toe. That is art. I cleaned his rifle, rifles are always clean on service, because that is art. I pipe-clayed his helmet, pipe clay is always used on active service and is indispensable to art. I shaved his chin, I washed his hands and gave him an air of fatted peace. Result, military tailor's pattern-plate. Price, thank Heaven, twice as much as for the first sketch, which was moderately decent." Torpenhow answered Dick's sarcastic yielding to false taste by putting his boot through the canvass as the picture deserved.

It was just this false public taste that West resisted and by resisting restored to us a historical principle of great value in every other profession as well as in art. He painted historical scenes in their natural historical setting whether the setting was pleasing or not, so it

was true to life. He taught us to care more for the truth than for what was pleasing.

West did not teach us this lesson without some pain to himself, for, when, in his "Death of Wolfe" he attempted to put modern costumes on modern men, George the Third and the Archbishop of Canterbury said they would have nothing to do with so bold an inovator. Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Archbishop called on West to persuade him to abandon the attempt and not ruin his future. West refused saying, "The event to be commemorated happened in the year 1758, in a region unknown to the Greeks and Romans and when no warriors who wore more classical costume existed." When the picture was finished Reynolds said, "West has conquered. He has treated the subject as it ought to be treated. I retract my objections. I foresee that this picture will not only become popular, but will occasion a revolution in art." Reynolds prophecy has been fulfilled.

For the use West made of his talents by patient toil, for his romantic history from a poor

unknown lad in the forests, to a position of the greatest English painter of his day and the first great American painter, but more especially for the great service he did as a historical painter, we as Americans and as Pennsylvanians and Swarthmarians may be justly proud.



X.

MRS. BROWNING'S DEFENCE OF
BENJAMIN WEST.

"Others shall sing the song
Others shall right the wrong,
Finish what I begin
And all I fail of, win."

* * * *

"Ring, bells in unrequited steeples
The joy of unborn peoples,
Sound trumpets, far off blown
Your triumph is my own!"

WHITTIER.

I N the history of art, West will be remembered and honored chiefly on account of his picture, "The death of General Wolfe." Because, by means of this picture, he taught artists the principle of historical setting, a principle indispensable to art not only, but indispensable in any sphere of study and in any sphere of achievement, as well. He taught the English artist that he must:

"Draw the thing as he sees it
For the God of things as they are."



Photogravure Goupil & Co.

CIMABUE'S MADONNA CARRIED THROUGH THE STREETS OF FLORENCE

Sir Frederic Leighton

And we have not learned this needed lesson unless in our judgment of West, we apply to him, the historical principle for which his great picture stands. If we would rightly judge any man's life or work, we must look at him in his historical setting and judge him by the conditions of his own times. It is not fair to judge West by the standards of to-day. If a man is to serve his own age, he must do two things. He must first of all, speak in the language of his age and embody its ideals and its best attainments. This West did, for he was the leading English historical painter of his day. This means that he spoke home to the hearts of the common people in language they could understand, and also that he stood among the first artists of his time.

The second thing he must do, is to be in advance of his day, and endeavor to bring it up to the level of what he sees. This West also did, for he corrected the false standards of taste in England, and taught English artists the true principle of historical painting.

Whatever may be West's defects as a painter, it is evident that without him English art would not be what it now is. The triumphs of modern art are therefore partly his own. If we have outgrown West, if we have come into larger possessions than our forefathers enjoyed, it is only because we are standing on their shoulders. What we now possess has been made possible only because of what they did. It is ingratitude to despise the rounds of the ladder by which we have ascended. In any right estimate of a man's work everything depends on a right point of view. And the right point of view from which to judge West, may be most briefly and most clearly seen by means of a parable.

There is a sweet old story come down to us, concerning Cimabue, the father of modern painting, and concerning his great picture, "The Madonna and Child." On a certain day in 1270, Charles of Anjou, was passing through Florence and was permitted to see Cimabue's picture in his studio. The populace followed the royal visitor. The Madonna

was then unveiled for the first time and the people so admired it that they carried it in triumphal procession to the church of Santa Maria Novella, where it now is, shouting so joyously that the quarter of the city has ever since been called "Borgo Allegri." The people shouted for the picture and not for the King who accompanied it. This story, six hundred years old has been preserved for us by the picture of Sir Frederic Leighton, a cut of which is here given.

Leighton by his brush and Mrs. Browning by her pen have converted the story into a parable. If in the light of later and better work we are tempted to underrate and scorn Cimabue's picture, "we ought to remember," pleads Mrs. Browning, "that it was the best work of art in its day and received universal praise." It is not fair to blame Cimabue because his picture was not better than the best. He set a high standard for those that followed him.

"Let us also remember," pleads Mrs. Browning again, "that when Cimabue found

his little pupil and successor Giotto, among his sheep folds on a Tuscan hillside, drawing with boyish art a sheep upon a stone and brought him to his Florentine studio to teach him art, and when Giotto soon surpassed his master, Cimabue was the first to rejoice." Leighton in his picture represents Cimabue leading the little Giotto by the hand. Cimabue was large enough to see that he was only a stepping stone in the progress of art, but none the less a necessary step, for that. We ought, at least to look on him as he looked upon himself. His spirit was the same that characterized the beautiful life of George Frederic Watts, who said of his work: "To work with all the heart's energies, but also with all the heart's simplicity; that is duty, and whoever does it has the right to be content, whatever be the result of his labors. If I have served to show the way so that others will do better, I shall be satisfied, but I do not count upon my work's being found great in itself."

This parable has an exact application to Benjamin West. As we are tempted, from the

heights of Raphaelhood, to gaze scorn down on Cimabue, so are we tempted to-day from the heights of Pre-Raphaelitehood in England, to gaze down scorn on West. But Heaven anoints the head of no such critic, and when Mrs. Browning and Frederic Leighton defended Cimabue from such critics and such unjust judgment, they were defending West from later critics who are tempted to "forget the rock whence they are hewn and the hole of the pit whence they are digged."

Lest we forget our debt to the workers of the past and in order to emphasize, by parable and picture, the point of view from which West ought to be always judged, Leighton's picture is here given and the passage in part is here quoted from Mrs. Browning's "*Casa Guidi windows*."

"By Cimabue's Virgin. Bright and brave
That picture was accounted, mark, of old,
A King stood bare before its sov'ran grace,
A reverent people shouted to behold
The picture, not the King, and even the place
Containing such a miracle, grew bold,
Named the glad Borgo from that beauteous face
Which thrilled the artist after work to think
His own ideal Mary-smile should stand
So very near him,—he within the brink

Of all that glory, let in by his hand
 With too divine a rashness ! Yet none shrink
 Who come to gaze here now, albeit 'twas planned
 Sublimely in the thought's simplicity.
 The Lady, throned in empyreal state,
 Minds only the young Babe upon her knee,
 While sidelong angels bear the royal weight
 Prostrated meekly, smiling tenderly
 Oblivious of their wings ; the child thereat
 Stretching its hand like God, If any should,
 Because of some stiff draperies and loose joints
 Gaze scorn down from the heights of Raphaelhood
 On Cimabue's picture, Heaven annoints
 The head of no such critic and his blood
 The poet's curse strikes full on, and appoints
 To ague and cold spasms forevermore.
 A noble picture ! worthy of the shout
 Wherewith along the streets the people bore
 Its cherub faces, which the sun threw out,
 Until they stopped, and entered the church door
 Yet rightly was young Giotto talked about,
 Whom Cimabue found among the sheep,
 And knew, as gods know gods, and carried home
 To paint the things he had painted, with a deep
 And fuller insight, and so overcome
 His Chapel-Lady, with a heavenlier sweep
 Of light ; for thus we mount into the sun
 Of great things known or acted. I hold, too,
 That Cimabue smiled upon the lad
 At the first stroke which passed what he could do,
 Or else his Virgin's smile had never had
 Such sweetness in it. All great men who foreknew
 Their heirs in art, for art's sake have been glad,
 And bent their old white heads as if uncrowned.
 Fanatics of their pure ideals still
 Far more than of their triumphs, which were found
 With some less vehement struggle of the will."

* * * * *

" The same blue waters where the dolphins swim
 Suggest the tritons. Through the blue immense
 Strike out, all swimmers ! cling not in the way

Of one another, so to sink, but learn
The strong man's impulse, catch the freshening spray
He threw up in his motions, and discern
By his clear westering eye, the time of day.
Thou, God, hast set us worthy gifts to earn
Besides thy Heaven and Thee ! and when I say
There's room here for the weakest man alive
To live and die, there's room, too, I repeat
For all the strongest to live well and strive
Their own way by their individual heat,
Like some new bee-swarm leaving the old hive
Despite the wax which tempts so violet-sweet.
Then let the living live, the dead retain
Their grave-cold flowers ! Though honor's best supplied
By bringing actions to prove theirs not vain."

IMPORTANT DATES IN WEST'S LIFE.

- 1738—West was born.
- 1744—Produces his first sketch.
- 1754—Invents the camera obscura.
- 1756—Goes with Anthony Wayne to fight
Indians.
- 1760—Visits Italy.
- 1763—Arrives in England.
- 1765—Marries Elizabeth Shewell
- 1768—Helps to found the Royal Academy of
Art.
- 1792—Succeeds Reynolds as President of Royal
Academy.
- 1792—Refuses the honor of knighthood offered
by the King.
- 1811—Teaches art to Samuel Morse.
- 1817—His wife dies.
- 1820—West dies.
- 1820—Buried in St. Pauls' Cathedral.

GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE



3 3125 01202 9282

